



*Music... will help  
dissolve your perplexities  
and purify your character  
and sensibilities, and in  
time of care and sorrow, it  
will keep a fountain of joy  
alive in you.*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

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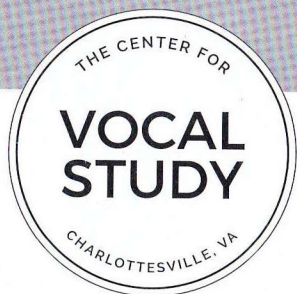
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## *Program Notes*

Joy should be the theme of any performance for the holiday season, whether inspired by Christian iconography or gratitude for marking the end of another year. In these concert selections, we find joy in all manner of musical works, from familiar carols in new settings to new works that could become future favorites.

**Personent Hodie**, a hymn of Germanic origin, first appeared in the Finnish songbook *Piae Cantiones* in 1582. Swedish and Finnish music students most likely came across the hymn while studying in Prague, a frequent destination of Scandinavian clerics during the 16th century. A similar version of the melody is found in a hymn that dates from 1382 from the nearby German city of Moosburg in Bavaria. Billed as a "festival procession," the piece often includes trumpets and percussion, as it does in this setting by former UNC-Chapel Hill music professor and choral conductor Lara Hoggard.

Benjamin Britten composed his anthem **A Hymn to the Virgin** (1930) at age 16 while ill in the infirmary at his Norfolk boarding school. He wrote the piece in a few hours; according to Imogen Holst, Britten's collaborator and assistant, there was no music paper within reach, so he drew the staves on a page from an ordinary exercise book. He found the anonymous 14th-century mixed-language text in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Britten drew inspiration from his 17th-century English predecessor Henry Purcell, among others. In this piece, Purcell's influence is seen in the verse-and-response cadence, with a main choir singing the vernacular verses and a semi-chorus (sometimes a quartet) singing the Latin responses. Some church-based performances have featured physical separation of the two choruses, with the semi-chorus taking to a balcony to create a unique polyphonic effect. One of his earliest compositions, *A Hymn to the Virgin* remained one of Britten's favorites, and it was performed at his memorial service on December 7, 1976.

In **Welcome All Wonders** (1993), contemporary composer J.A.C. Redford's penchant for non-Biblical poetry and novel musical forms shows in the juxtaposition of ancient and modern texts. Redford writes at his website, [www.jacredford.com](http://www.jacredford.com), "In the pantheon of the arts, poetry is nearly as important to me as music. So when I set out to compose a vocal work, the choice of a text is critical to me." Best described as a Christmas cantata in five movements, this piece uses 17th-century British poet Richard Crashaw's eponymous poem as well as Christmas-themed verse from 16th-century poet Robert Southwell and modern authors Vassar Miller and Brian Wren. While Crashaw's title poem has also been set to music by Redford's contemporaries Richard Dirksen and Stephen Paulus, among others, it is not a traditional religious choral music setting such as a *Magnificat* or a *Gloria*.

Redford would later title his 1997 autobiography *Welcome All Wonders*, a testament to the powerful influences of religion, music and poetry in his life. Drawing inspiration from a wide variety of musical genres that include English choral music, jazz and rock, Redford describes his compositional style as a combination of "natural lyricism with acerbic harmony and counterpoint. I love dance-like rhythms



and irregular time signatures, colorful orchestration, and narrative forms that take the listener on a journey." Redford's compositions have been performed by the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, violinist Joshua Bell, the Chicago Symphony and the New York Philharmonic, among others. He has written music for the television series "Coach" and "St. Elsewhere," receiving Emmy nominations for both. He has orchestrated the scores for movies from *WALL-E* to *Skyfall*, for which he arranged and conducted pop singer Adele's Oscar-winning title song.

**Resonet in Laudibus** from 14th-century Germany was widely known throughout Reformation-era Europe, and became a part of both Catholic and Lutheran traditions – it was reportedly a favorite of Martin Luther. American conductor and composer Stephen Mager's setting dates from 1998.

*The Snowman* is a 1978 illustrated children's book by British author Raymond Briggs, made into a short film in 1982. ***Walking in the Air***, the theme song of the film, was written by British pianist, conductor and composer Howard Blake and sung in the film by St. Paul's Cathedral choirboy Peter Auty. A 1985 version of the song recorded by Aled Jones – Auty's voice had broken by then – reached #5 on the charts in the U.K.

**Riu Riu Chiu** is a 16th-century Spanish *villancico* (Christmas carol) of unknown origin. It deals with the themes of the Immaculate Conception and Nativity, although *riu riu chiú* is said to be an onomatopoetic rendering of the sound of a kingfisher, which has a variety of symbolic connotations. The carol saw a rebirth in popularity in the late 20th century, fueled by recordings from such diverse musical groups as Chanticleer and The Monkees.

And for many lovers of choral works, it would hardly be the holidays without the opportunity to hear Handel's magisterial **Hallelujah Chorus** from *Messiah* (1741). The original performance was presented by a choir of 16 men and 16 boy choristers. While the custom of standing for the chorus' performance is based on the belief that King George II did so at its London premiere, there is no convincing evidence for this story. Nevertheless, standing for the *Hallelujah Chorus* is a tradition – and what better time for traditions than the holidays?

– Matthew Butterman, *Oratorio Society member*


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